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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000854

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SUBJECT: MEETINGS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN NAY PYI TAW

Classified By: DCM Tom Vajda for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) DCM and Consul visited Nay Pyi Taw October 29-30 for courtesy calls at the Foreign Ministry, part of Post's effort to expand contacts with mid-level GOB officials. The meeting with the Director General for Consular Affairs was particularly productive, as he pledged to bypass his superiors in approving visas for routine visits by some USG regional personnel -- though not for USAID, which, he indicated, the regime continues to view with suspicion. All the MOFA officials welcomed greater interaction with the Embassy; the same was not true of officials in the Ministries of Home Affairs and Immigration, who turned down our meeting requests (relying on MOFA to deliver the bad news). Career bureaucrats aren't the agents of change that Burma needs, but they'll have to play an important role in any transition. End Summary.

2. (C) DCM and Consul met the Director Generals for Consular and Legal Affairs, International Organizations, and ASEAN Affairs, as well as the Director of Protocol and assorted staff during an October 29-30 visit to Nay Pyi Taw. All meetings took place in a reception room of the Foreign Ministry, an uninspiring and surprisingly small building -- following what appears to be a cookie cutter design for all ministry headquarters -- that is dwarfed by the gargantuan edifices under construction to house the SPDC, USDA, and new Parliament. DCM and Consul were supposed to meet over lunch with North American Division Director Yin Yin Oo and her staff (in effect, her chaperones; Yin Yin Oo indicated she was not able to dine with us alone). However, she cancelled the lunch as well as a rescheduled dinner meeting.

3. (C) Our requests for meetings with Directors General in the Home Affairs and Immigration Ministries were turned down. We had intended to raise American Citizen Services issues as well as recent cases in which our FSNs have had their passports confiscated or their renewal applications denied -- presumably as retaliation for working at our Embassy. Yin Yin Oo passed the news about the denial of these meeting requests, noting in a quiet aside that in the case of Home Affairs, the Minister was out of town and no one on his staff dared to meet us without his prior permission. The Charge has a request to meet with the Home Affairs Minister on the books, one of several ministerial meeting requests awaiting reply. We will try again at the DG level with both ministries as well.

4. (C) The meetings at MOFA were primarily courtesy calls, part of the Embassy's efforts to expand contacts with mid-level GOB officials. We did conduct business with DG for

Consular Affairs Min Lwin, raising our difficulties in securing visas for TDY and permanent staff. Min Lwin, who previously served in the U.S. Embassy in Washington from 2000-2005, was both candid and helpful. He acknowledged that visa applications from USG officials are subject to particular scrutiny and have to be approved by the Foreign Affairs Policy Committee (FAPC, a high-level policy committee, reportedly chaired by SPDC Secretary 1 Lt. General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, which meets once a week in Nay Pyi Taw). Min Lwin told us we should send letters to him directly to seek visa approvals for routine regional visits, such as for medical, IT, consular, and facilities-related personnel; he pledged to approve them expeditiously. In these cases, he recommended we refrain from submitting the normal diplomatic notes, thus keeping the applications outside the purview of his MOFA superiors and the FAPC.

15. (C) Min Lwin made clear that we would still have to submit diplomatic notes for regional USAID personnel, commenting that such visits remain sensitive, in part because of concerns among senior officials that USAID engages in "political" activities in Burma. He acknowledged that such reports might be baseless, but said they are taken seriously by senior leaders. Min Lwin also intimated that the GOB has a list of USAID officials for whom entry visas would not be granted, but provided no further information. He did, however, agree to approve the visa applications for two USAID officials in response to our specific requests at the meeting (presumably their names aren't on the GOB blacklist), as well as for a permanent staff member assigned to the Defense Attache's Office.

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16. (C) Min Lwin -- later echoed by IO Director General Thant Kyaw -- reported that our decision to deny FM Nyan Win's request to visit the Burmese Embassy in Washington during his trip to New York for UNGA provoked "unhappiness" at MOFA. Min Lwin noted ruefully that it made it more difficult for him to be seen as accommodating to our requests. We shared our sense that in addition to any other USG concerns related to the FM's proposed D.C. visit, its timing -- corresponding to the one-year anniversary of the regime's crackdown on the monk-led protests -- was problematic. It appeared neither official had made the connection, though we had previously underscored the same point to others in MOFA.

17. (C) We asked IO DG Thant Kyaw about possible visits to Burma by UN Special Envoy Gambari or UNSYG Ban. He was unwilling, or more likely unable, to provide any information. He acknowledged that UN visits are handled primarily by Burma's Mission in New York and that many of the details, particularly regarding meeting schedules, are approved at the highest levels in Nay Pyi Taw. Thant Kyaw admitted, in fact, that he has often been caught unaware of changes in Gambari's schedule during the latter's visits. Thant Kyaw did not raise the draft Third Committee resolution on human rights in Burma, though we provided an opening by soliciting his views on GOB priorities and concerns at this year's UNGA. As for the ASEAN DG, he seemed singularly uninterested in discussing ASEAN matters, wanting instead to chat about elections and constitutions, both ours and theirs.

18. (C) In all cases the MOFA officials -- senior career diplomats, many with prior service in the United States and with children studying there still -- were welcoming, avoided polemics, and appeared genuinely interested in greater contact with the Embassy. The conventional wisdom here is that Burmese career bureaucrats, many of them still smarting from the forced relocation to Nay Pyi Taw (most of their families choose, wisely from what we saw of the place, to remain in Rangoon), are no fans of their leaders. We saw nothing to refute that assumption. Civil servants like the ones we met won't be the ones to bring about change in Burma, but they will have an important role to play after any

transition in helping to run the government.

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